

Being a Good Listener

Thank you so much for supporting Measuring the Mountain and helping others to share their story. This document outlines some approaches, tips and suggestions for getting the most out of each story.

We want to hear stories rather than case studies: stories are personal, tell us a lot about context and perception, and they focus on a particular experience. People are telling each other stories all the time, so most people will have something to share.

Because these are stories and not case studies please:

- Write them in the first person ('I') as though it is the person speaking to you that is writing
- Don't worry if the story isn't highlighting something particularly good or bad – that doesn't matter at all - we'd like to hear about any experience a person would like to share
- Try to capture one experience with each story, rather than summarising someone's interactions with a service, or charting their progress in some way. If someone has several stories they'd like to share that's great, and we'd love to hear them all
- Use their words as much as possible

One good way to help someone share their story is to:

- Ask them the prompt question (question 1 of SenseMaker – you'll have been through other aspects of the project already by then)
- Let them tell you the story without you writing anything down – just listen, and maybe ask some questions
- Then write it down
- Read it back to the person, and check that this is what they wanted to say and that the language is about right
- Make any changes they say are needed

You'll remember a lot more than you might think by just listening the first time around, and you'll make sharing the story much more enjoyable for the other person.

Please keep in mind:

- The person sharing the story may need to stop and think – silences can feel uncomfortable, but sometimes they're needed
- Try not to rush someone, make sure you've allowed enough time for each story. You can let the other person know at the start how long you've got and, if needs be, keep a clock in sight
- Don't put words in someone's mouth, it's really tempting at times to finish someone's sentence but it is usually more annoying than helpful
- You may not agree with someone's interpretation of an event, or how they've expressed an experience – please don't let this influence how you document it, or how you help that person to answer the SenseMaker questions
- You may have a story in mind that you think that person should share but don't let this stop them sharing something else

We want people to share any experience or story that stands out for them which means some of them will be very positive, some negative, some will be recent and so come to mind more easily; there will be long stories, short stories; stories that involve lots of people, those that involve no-one else; some of them will be fragmented and half-remembered, and others will be detailed and precise. All of these are totally fine, and we'd love to hear them all!

Staying impartial

This can be really difficult! If you follow the guidance above then you will be most of the way there with being impartial.

The most likely way to influence someone's story is if they aren't sure what is meant by 'social care' and ask you to give an example of the kind of story they could tell. Your first thought may be something specific to them, eg if they have a carer, you might suggest they tell you a story about their carer.

This may mean they then tell you exactly the story you've just suggested.

On the first page of SenseMaker are some examples of what we mean by social care. You may want to create short list for yourself so you can give examples that don't apply to the person you're speaking to.

For example, you may say to someone who doesn't have meals on wheels – 'well, someone who has meals on wheels, might tell a story about that'. Or to someone who doesn't have, or provide, respite care – 'well, someone who has respite care might share a story about their most recent stay there'.

Questions and approaches you might want to use in different situations

As you help people to share their stories, you may encounter some situations that are trickier than others to manage. We've outlined a few suggestions for approaches to take in these, and you'll need to use your knowledge, skills and judgement to decide on the best thing to do.

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| <p>The story is about something abusive or about criminal activity</p> | <p>You need to report this.</p> <p>Depending on what you're told you may need to call 999 or 101 to speak to the police. In ALL cases, you MUST follow your organisation's safe guarding policies.</p> |
| <p>Story is very long and detailed</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer a timeframe for the story collecting saying it should take a few minutes for the story or that you'll need to leave by... • Summarise as much as you can as you go – 'It sounds like you're saying...', 'Can I just check that...?' • Suggest focusing on just one element of what they're saying, and to focus on their experience • If there are multiple stories in there, try to identify and summarise them, then suggest you can hear them each individually, or ask that they choose one • Details are nice, but not always necessary especially if someone is struggling to recall them |
| <p>Story is very short</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask open questions like 'How did you feel about that?', 'What happened next? Before that?', 'Can you tell me a bit more about that?' • Once you've answered the SenseMaker questions, ask if there's anything else they'd like to add to the story – you may have some additional prompts from the questions • The story may only be very short and that's fine. It may also be just a fragment rather than a whole story and that's also fine |
| <p>You're not sure the story is quite what the project is after</p> | <p>That's fine! The project is primarily about social care but we are anticipating stories about health services, social groups and activities, and any number of other topics.</p> |

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| | <p>Social care is a part of people’s lives and we’re expecting that the stories we hear will reflect this.</p> |
| <p>The story is about someone another person, not the person telling it</p> | <p>This may be fine – in some cases a story may focus on someone else but the person sharing it was there, and was involved.</p> <p>What we don’t want, are second-hand stories from the perspective of a person who isn’t there to contribute.</p> |
| <p>The story is confusing</p> | <p>Try to clarify the story as much as you can. Use questions like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can I check that..? Am I right in thinking that..? <p>Don’t worry if you can’t really understand the story, especially if you’ve listening to it for a while – the answers to the questions will still be incredibly helpful, and answering those questions may make some aspects of the story clearer.</p> |
| <p>You don’t know if their story is true</p> | <p>That’s fine – we’re asking for stories because a person’s perspective is such an important factor in their experiences.</p> <p>We want Listeners to support people to share their stories but, as much as possible, to not influence them. This can be especially difficult if you know someone, and think that something in their story isn’t quite right, but please don’t write down anything that the other person hasn’t said – their understanding of a situation is critical to our understanding of social care experiences.</p> |